

19th Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Conference 2026 Workshop Proposal

EDI 2026 - Marrakech, Morocco

2nd – 4th July 2026

Workshop Title: Navigating the Paradox: An Interactive Workshop on DEI Leadership in Global Technology Organizations

Workshop Leader: Dr. Parish Jefferson
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Ph.D., Organizational Development & Leadership (2025)

Workshop Duration: 90 minutes

Target Audience: DEI practitioners, organizational development professionals, HR leaders, technology sector managers, academics studying organizational diversity, and anyone working to advance equity in technology-driven organizations (maximum 40 participants)

Workshop Rationale

Global technology firms occupy a contradictory position in contemporary diversity, equity, and inclusion work. While tech companies make public commitments to DEI and employ dedicated professionals to lead this work, these same organizations perpetuate structural inequalities through algorithmic bias, homogeneous leadership, exclusionary cultures, and product development processes that marginalize underrepresented communities.

This paradox places DEI professionals at the center of fundamental organizational tensions. They are tasked with transforming institutions that simultaneously resist, commodify, and instrumentalize their work. Drawing from qualitative research with DEI professionals in major global technology firms, this workshop moves beyond academic presentation to create an experiential learning space where participants grapple with the real dilemmas facing DEI practitioners.

Rather than offering prescriptive solutions, the workshop uses scenario-based learning, role-play, and structured dialogue to help participants develop their own frameworks for navigating organizational paradoxes. The format honors the reality that DEI work is context-dependent, culturally situated, and requires adaptive rather than technical responses.

Given EDI 2026's location in Marrakech and emphasis on global transformations, the workshop explicitly addresses tensions between Western-developed DEI models and their application across geographic, cultural, and regulatory contexts. Participants will consider: What gets lost when Silicon Valley's DEI frameworks travel globally? How might emerging technology ecosystems develop alternative approaches to organizational inclusion?

Learning Objectives

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

1. **Identify and analyze** the three core paradoxes facing DEI professionals in technology organizations: performative vs. transformative work, local vs. global frameworks, and professional identity tensions
2. **Practice strategic decision-making** through scenario-based exercises that simulate real dilemmas DEI practitioners encounter
3. **Develop adaptive responses** to organizational resistance that go beyond conventional "business case" arguments for diversity
4. **Critically examine** Western DEI models and their applicability across cultural contexts, particularly in emerging technology ecosystems
5. **Create action strategies** for advancing equity work within structural constraints while maintaining integrity and avoiding co-optation
6. **Build community** with other practitioners and scholars navigating similar challenges

Workshop Format & Activities

Pre-Workshop (Participants receive 1 week prior):

- Brief research summary (2 pages) introducing the three paradoxes
- Pre-work reflection questions to prime thinking

Part 1: Setting the Stage (15 minutes)

Activity: "Where Are You in the Paradox?"

Participants physically position themselves along three continuum lines in the room:

- Performative ←→ Transformative (Where is your current DEI work positioned?)
- Technical Expert ←→ Organizational Outsider (How does your organization position you?)
- Western Model ←→ Local Adaptation (Which frameworks guide your work?)

Brief interviews with people at different positions create immediate engagement and surface the diversity of experiences in the room.

Part 2: The Performative-Transformative Dilemma (20 minutes)

Scenario: You are the DEI Director at a global tech firm. The CEO wants to launch a high-profile diversity campaign featuring employee stories and updated demographic dashboards. Meanwhile, your data shows persistent pay inequity, homogeneous leadership, and exclusionary promotion practices. The marketing budget for the campaign exceeds your entire annual DEI operating budget. You have a meeting with the CEO tomorrow.

Small Group Exercise (10 min): Groups of 4-5 work through the scenario:

- What are your options?
- What are the risks and benefits of each approach?
- How do you maintain your integrity while working within constraints?

Debrief (10 min): Gallery walk where groups post their strategies. Whole group identifies patterns, trade-offs, and creative approaches.

Part 3: The Local-Global Dilemma (25 minutes)

Fishbowl Discussion Setup: Inner circle of 6 participants takes on assigned roles:

- DEI leader at Silicon Valley headquarters
- DEI lead in company's Lagos office
- DEI lead in company's Mumbai office
- DEI lead in company's São Paulo office
- Chief Legal Officer (concerned about compliance)
- Employee Resource Group leader (representing local concerns)

Scenario: The company is rolling out a standardized global DEI framework developed in the U.S. It includes mandatory unconscious bias training, identity-based Employee Resource Groups, and demographic tracking using U.S. census categories. Local offices are raising concerns about cultural fit, legal constraints, and whether these categories capture local inequalities.

Fishbowl Process (15 min):

- Inner circle discusses: How do we create globally consistent DEI while honoring local contexts?
- Outer circle observes, takes notes
- Outer circle members can "tap in" to replace inner circle participants when they have something to add

Debrief (10 min): What did we learn about the tensions between standardization and localization? What might decolonized DEI frameworks look like?

Part 4: The Professional Identity Crisis (20 minutes)

Individual Reflection (5 min): Participants write responses to:

- When have you felt most effective in DEI work? What conditions made that possible?
- When have you felt most constrained or compromised? What forces created those constraints?
- What would need to change structurally for your work to have deeper impact?

Triad Conversations (10 min): Groups of three share reflections, looking for:

- Common patterns in what enables vs. constrains DEI work
- Structural vs. individual barriers
- What's within our sphere of influence vs. what requires organizational transformation

Whole Group Harvest (5 min): Capture key insights on shared visual board

Part 5: Building Your Adaptive Strategy (10 minutes)

Personal Action Planning:

Participants use a framework to develop their own approach:

Given my context, I will:

1. **Leverage** (What existing organizational structures, relationships, or initiatives can I use?)
2. **Challenge** (What will I push back on, even if it's risky?)
3. **Build** (What new structures, coalitions, or practices will I create?)

4. **Let Go** (What battles am I choosing not to fight right now?)
5. **Stay Whole** (How will I maintain my integrity and avoid burnout?)

Part 6: Closing Circle & Commitments (10 minutes)

Popcorn Sharing: Participants offer one commitment or insight they're taking from the workshop

Community Building: Exchange contact information for ongoing peer support network

Connection to EDI 2026 Conference Themes

This workshop directly engages multiple conference themes:

Technology, Data & Digital Inequality: Centers the technology sector as a critical site for examining how organizations simultaneously produce and claim to address inequality.

Global Work and the Future of Employment: Explores how DEI frameworks developed in Western contexts travel (or fail to travel) as tech firms expand globally.

Inclusive Leadership and Organizational Transformation: Positions DEI professionals as change agents navigating complex organizational dynamics.

Governance, Policy & Global Solidarity: Examines tensions between organizational policies and local contexts, raising questions about whose models of inclusion should guide global technology firms.

African Context: Given Marrakech's location and the conference's emphasis on African perspectives, the workshop explicitly questions whether Western tech firms' DEI approaches should serve as models for emerging technology ecosystems across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Rather than positioning Silicon Valley as the standard, the workshop invites participants to imagine alternative starting points for building equitable technology organizations.

Pedagogical Approach

This workshop employs adult learning principles and liberatory pedagogical practices:

Experiential Learning: Participants learn through doing, not just listening. Scenarios are based on real situations DEI professionals encounter.

Horizontal Knowledge Creation: The facilitator does not position themselves as the expert with answers. Instead, participants' lived experiences are centered as valid knowledge.

Practice-Research Integration: Academic findings provide frameworks, but practitioner wisdom drives the learning.

Embodied Learning: Physical movement (continuum exercise, fishbowl) creates engagement and prevents passive reception.

Critical Reflection: Activities push participants to examine underlying assumptions about DEI work, organizational change, and whose frameworks count as legitimate.

Action Orientation: The workshop concludes with concrete commitments participants can implement in their contexts.

Materials Needed

- Large room with movable chairs
- Wall space for posting flip chart paper
- Flip charts and markers
- Handouts (scenarios, reflection prompts, action planning template)
- Name tags for fishbowl role assignments

Facilitator Background

Dr. Parish Jefferson brings extensive scholarly expertise and deep practitioner experience to this workshop. He holds a Ph.D. in Organizational Development and Leadership (2025), with dissertation research examining DEI professionals in global technology organizations through qualitative inquiry. He also holds advanced degrees in Education and Social Work, providing interdisciplinary perspectives on organizational change, leadership development, and systemic equity work.

Dr. Jefferson has over 25 years of organizational leadership experience in major global technology firms, including Microsoft and Hewlett-Packard, where he gained firsthand understanding of the structural dynamics, organizational cultures, and change resistance patterns that characterize the technology sector. This corporate experience informs his research with practical insights into how large-scale organizations actually function.

Currently, Dr. Jefferson serves as Center Manager at the University of California San Diego's Sanford Stem Cell Institute Discovery Center, where he leads education programs, outreach initiatives, events, and budget management. He also teaches leadership and organizational development courses at UC San Diego Extension, covering topics including organizational development, team dynamics, conflict resolution, and first-time manager development.

Dr. Jefferson is a published author whose work bridges academic scholarship and accessible practitioner guidance. His book "If DEI Could Talk" addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion challenges in contemporary organizations. He regularly presents at national conferences on leadership, organizational development, and DEI topics.

This unique combination of advanced academic training, corporate technology sector experience, current organizational leadership responsibilities, and teaching expertise positions Dr. Jefferson to facilitate authentic dialogue between researchers and practitioners. His dual identity as scholar-practitioner allows him to bridge theoretical frameworks with the lived realities of organizational change work. His facilitation approach emphasizes experiential learning, critical reflection, and developing adaptive capacity rather than prescriptive solutions.

Expected Outcomes

Participants will leave with:

1. **Analytical frameworks** for understanding the paradoxes they navigate in DEI work
2. **Peer connections** with others facing similar challenges across global contexts
3. **Concrete strategies** tailored to their specific organizational contexts
4. **Critical perspectives** on Western DEI models and their limitations
5. **Renewed energy and solidarity** for continuing difficult organizational change work
6. **Personal action plan** with specific next steps

The workshop creates space for honest conversation about the challenges of DEI work without descending into cynicism. It acknowledges structural constraints while building agency. It honors the difficulty of this work while fostering community and shared learning.

Submission Contact Information:

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